

GOVERNMENT OF ANDHRA PRADESH

ABSTRACT

MINORITIES WELFARE DEPARTMENT – Guidelines for assistance to Christian pilgrimage – Orders – Issued.

MINORITIES WELFARE (ICM) DEPARTMENT

G.O.Ms.No. 29

Dated 21st July, 2008.

Read the following:

1. From Sri T.Stanley Babu, IRTS, Advisor to Govt. of A.P. Representation dated 26.4.2008.
2. From the Executive Vice President, A.P. Federation of Churches Hyderabad Letter dated 25.4.2008.
3. Govt.D.O.Lr.No. 7064/ICM/A2/07, dated 1.5.2008 and even of No. dated 10.6.2008.

ORDER:

In the Budget 2008-09 an amount of Rs.2.00 crores has been provided under new scheme for assistance to Christian pilgrimage.

2. To operationalize the new scheme, the following guidelines are issued:

Guidelines on Christian Pilgrimage to the Holy land of Jerusalem

Introduction

This pilgrimage covers a very large number of places connected with the life of Jesus Christ in Israel. Mainly, they are:

- a. Place of birth - BETHLEHEM
- b. Place of Crucifixion, Death and Resurrection – JERUSALEM
- c. Place of bringing up - NAZARETH
- d. Place of Baptism - JORDAN RIVER
- e. Places of preaching - around DEAD SEA and SEA OF GALILEE
- f. Several other places connected with Christian faith.

This is only tentative. To be finalized after final selection of tour operator. In the event of any international problem some items may be dropped.

Pilgrimage to Holy land is very sacred to all Christians and is a trip for Spiritual Rejuvenation. The pilgrimage covers several places of Worship, Tradition and Christian Rituals. At almost all the above places, churches are built and during visits, the pilgrims have opportunity to pray and worship besides two most important aspects of pilgrimage, i.e., Baptism and Eucharistic Celebration.

Groups of about 50 pilgrims are being led by Travel agents who are well experienced and exposed to the above Christian holy places, traditions and Christian Practices.

Ordinarily, the tour period is for a week (Israel Government issues visas only for 7 days). It is proposed to evaluate the standard tour packages being offered by travel houses now namely Jordan and Israel package, Egypt – Israel – Jordan tour package and adopt the most economical package.

(P.T.O.).

With Rs. 2.00 crores had been budgeted by the Govt. in a year about year about 900 - 1,000 pilgrims in batches of 50-100 can visit the Holy land through this scheme sponsored by Government of Andhra Pradesh.

Criteria for selection of pilgrims

The following criteria for selection of the pilgrims will be adopted:

- a. Pilgrims should invariably be bonafide Christians certified through their academic records (SSC Certificate) or MRO or Baptism Certificate.
- b. The tour should be from Hyderabad back to Hyderabad.
- c. Each group will have a minimum of 50 and maximum of 100 pilgrims.
- d. Rs.20,000 may be granted for each pilgrim by the Government of Andhra Pradesh., on par with Muslim Haj Pilgrims. Over and above this, the expenses are borne by the pilgrims themselves.
- e. Assistance from the Government of Andhra Pradesh should be extended to needy. Preference will be given to **white card holders**.
- f. Selection should be **on first-come-first served-basis** with preference to white card holders.
- g. Preference should be given to the pilgrims of over 50 years of age, who are physically fit.
- h. Preference may be given to wife and husband in couples for pilgrimage so that they support each other throughout the pilgrimage tour.
- i. The applicants should be in possession of valid pass ports with a minimum validity period of 2 years at the time of applying.
- j. Applicants are required to apply through a web-based prescribed application form.

From the Government of Andhra Pradesh

It is necessary that Government takes all the initiative so that the grant reaches only the genuine Christian Pilgrims. Government may fix up the Tour Operator, so that the pilgrimage is smooth and the pilgrims have the satisfaction of not only visiting the sacred places, but also enjoy a comfortable and hassle-free tour.

The Government will advertise in the News papers inviting applications centrally from the eligible Christian pilgrims, fixing no time limit so that applications can be received continuously.

Applicants should apply online. After applying online a Hard-Copy of the application along with a copy of passport received through registered post or by hand delivery will be registered in the Christian Minority Cell of the Minority Welfare Department /A.P. Minorities Finance Corporation.

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Once the application is submitted online computer system will issue a provisional registered No. After receipt of Hard-Copy and if all the documents are in order final registered No. will be assigned.

Screening Committee

Screening Committee may consist of five members i) an officer from the Department of Minorities Welfare, ii) a Member from A.P. State Minorities Commission representing Christian Community, iii) an officer from A.P. Minority Finance Corporation and iv) two members of Christian community (to be nominated by Minister in-charge of Minority Welfare) – who may screen the applications and finalize the list in batches of 50-100 for three months in advance.

The process of screening should ensure transparency.

- a. All screened pilgrims should be bonafide Christians only.
- b. Should possess valid passports.
- c. It should be on ‘first-come-first-served-basis’ - without any differentiation between denominations with the preference as mentioned in earlier part of this order.

Selection of a Tour Operator:

The Government may call for applications through advertisement for Expression of Interest from the Travel agents of Hyderabad area (since the originating and destination point for pilgrimage will be Hyderabad) and then short list them based on the following criteria, after which final bids can be opened.

1. Company should have recognition by IATA, approval from Government of India Tourism. If it is a Member of the International Bodies and Member of TAAI will be added advantage.
2. The company must have a registered office with minimum three years of trade standing in Andhra Pradesh. Company should provide Document of Incorporation.
3. This organization should be conversant with Christian practices namely Baptism (a large number of pilgrims take baptism in River Jordan) Eucharistic Celebrations, Mass, Nativity, Via DOLOROSA, Holy SEPULCHER etc.,- since this is essentially a Religious Trip.
4. Apart from all paper submissions, a discussion/interviews may be conducted by Government to check about the authenticity and reliability of the Travel Operator.
5. The bid document shall be in two parts Technical bid and Financial bid.
6. A Committee under chairmanship of Prl Secy / Secy Minorities Welfare with following will evaluate the bids:
 - a) Officer nominated by Prl Secy / Secy Tourism
 - b) Officer nominated by Prl Finance Secretary
 - c) M.D., A.P. State Minorities Finance Corpn
 - d) Mr K.R.W. Yesudas, IAS (Retd), OSD, A.P. Information Commission.

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7. **The company must submit a detailed tour itinerary and the scheduled programme for approval for the whole year with details of total cost of tour indicating all facilities proposed.**
8. Once okayed, a Memorandum of Understanding can be signed between the Government and the said company.

Role of the travel company

It will be the responsibility of the Travel Agent to ensure safety of the pilgrims and a comfortable and hassle-free tour from the start to finish.

- a. All passports should be processed for obtaining Visas from the embassy concerned.
- b. The operator should make all arrangements to gather the Pilgrims in Hyderabad at one place on the day of travel, take responsibility for safe travel to the land of pilgrimage and bring them back to Hyderabad.
- c. A comfortable stay in Israel should be ensured – in any case not below room with double occupancy in a standard hotel.
- d. All meals should be ensured i.e., breakfast, lunch and dinner including atleast five liter of packaged drinking Water.
- e. Transportation along with Guide to take the pilgrims to places as per itinerary should be ensured.
- f. All entry passes and tips for various services will be the responsibility of the Tour Operator and shall be borne by the tour operator only.
- g. In case any pilgrim requires medical assistance, the same shall be ensured by the Tour Operator.
- h. The travel Operator should provide free travel to one pastor/priest in every batch which will facilitate them to be guided, led in prayer/worship at each of the spots. Spiritual significance of the pilgrimage will be explained in depth by the priest.
- i. Besides this, the Tour operator shall send a representative of the company as a tour leader to oversee all the arrangements, ensure safety and comfort of the Pilgrims. He will coordinate with all agencies, right from the time of starting till completion of the tour:
 1. The Tour Operator will receive documents from the concerned Minority cell in the Secretariat i.e. an application, a copy of the valid Passport, and SSC Certificate, or MRO's Certificate of a Baptism Certificate to confirm that the candidate is a Christian.
 2. DD for the individual contribution of the tour 30 days prior to departure and a certificate from the Government stating that the said person has been nominated for the tour to be received by the Tour Operator. The Govt. share will be released after satisfactory completion of tour.
 3. The Travel Company should settle all the Bills of the Pilgrims and give them a memorable Pilgrimage which is "all inclusive" and ensure all formalities for entry and exits in different airports and countries is fulfilled. It issues the air tickets, gets the visas for all passengers, books hotels and coaches, provides all meals, appoints licensed guides, and executes the entire itinerary.
 4. On the day of the commencement of the Tour the operator must have a detailed presentation to the pilgrims explaining all the precautions, dos and don'ts of the tour. For all the pilgrims a letter should be sent by the Tour Operator in advance about what to carry and other precautions.

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3. The prescribed application form “Pilgrims for Holy land visit” is annexed to this order.

4. The Managing Director, A.P. State Minorities Finance Corporation, Hyderabad is requested to take further action accordingly.

5. A copy of this order is also available in the internet and can be assessed at “www.aponline.gov.in and also www.apsmfc.gov.in.

(BY ORDER AND IN THE NAME OF THE GOVERNOR OF ANDHRA PRADESH)

**LINGARAJ PANIGRAHI,
PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO GOVERNMENT.**

To

The Managing Director,
A.P. State Minorities Finance Corporation Ltd., Hyderabad.
All District Collectors.

Copy to:

The P.S. to Chairman, A.P. State Minorities Commission, Hyd.
The P.S. to Chief Minister.
The P.S. to Minister(E,C & MW).
The Finance (Expr.SW) Dept.
SF/Sc.

//FORWARDED:;BY ORDER//

SECTION OFFICER

APPLICATION FROM PILGRIMS FOR HOLY LAND VISIT.

1. **Name of the applicant :**
 - a) Age :
 - b) Date of birth :
2. **Proof that the applicant is a Bonafide Christian -**
(Attach MRO's Certificate or School Certificate or Baptism Certificate.)
3. **Address for Correspondence :**
(e-mail I.D. _____ Mobile No. _____).
4. **Passport Details :**
 - a) Name (as recorded in passport) :
 - b) Number :
 - c) Valid till :
 - d) Pass port issued from :
(name of the passport office)
5. **Name of the Spouse: (if accompanying)**
 - a) Age :
 - b) Possessing a passport – Yes / No
6. **Certificate from a Doctor or self certification that applicant is medically fit to undertake the tour to be enclosed along with D.D. after intimation of tour is received by the applicant:**
7. **Are you willing to take the tour as scheduled by the Department (slot). (Any period which is not convenient to you, you may like to indicate. We will try to accommodate your request) (Yes/No.)**

If No, indicate which month is not suitable
8. **Your willingness to pay to tour operator the balance amount and all required papers at least two months in advance as and when called for by tour operator.**

Willing / Not willing. **(Yes/No.)**

Place:

Date :

Signature of the applicant

Note:

1. The tour will be aided by Govt. of A.P. to the extent of only Rs.20,000 per head and the balance to be borne by the applicant.
2. This scheme is meant for bona fide Christians only. (Producing a School / MRO's certificate or Baptism Certificate is a must, No other certificates will be accepted)

3. Sponsoring will be on first-come-first-served basis within the preferred category.
4. On filing application in web, provisional registration No. will be allotted.
5. In case of spouse, please fill in a separate application form.

(P.T.O).

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6. The tour will start from Hyderabad and ends at Hyderabad. Pilgrims will have to make their own arrangements to reach Hyderabad. Place and date of assembly will be intimated in due course.
7. Validity of the passport should be for 2 years from the date of application.
8. If a person is found medically not sound he will not be allowed to undertake the tour.
9. After applying online a Hard-Copy mentioning the provisional registered No., a Hard-Copy should be submitted along with all the relevant documents for following address, “so as to reach within (30) days”

**The Managing Director, (Christian Pilgrimage Cell),
A.P. State Minorities Finance Corporation, Ltd., Hyderabad.
5th Floor, Haj House Buildings, Hyderabad.**

If, Hard-Copy is not received within stipulated time, provisional registration will be cancelled and no further correspondence will be entertained.

**LINGARAJ PANIGRAHI,
PRINCIPAL SECRETARY TO GOVT.**

SECTION OFFICER